

TO: Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee
FROM: Amanda West, Director of Government Relations, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan
DATE: September 22, 2015
SUBJECT: House Bills 4787 and 4830– Criminal penalties for coercive abortion

No woman should be coerced into any decision concerning her pregnancy or reproductive health. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan, however, oppose House Bills 4787 and 4830 because they are redundant and yet, disingenuous.

First, there are already laws on the books that protect women from the coercion and discrimination these bills aim to address.

- Michigan's existing informed consent law already mandates that a woman's consent to an abortion must be "given freely and without coercion."
- Michigan already has statutes on the books that could make such coercion illegal - Aggravated Stalking (MCL 750.411i).
- Michigan's Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act already protects a woman from discrimination based on actions related to pregnancy, and this act was further strengthened to protect women in the work place with a bill co-sponsored by then Representative Rick Jones in 2009 (Public Act 190 of 2009; MCL 37.2202).

Second, coercive abortion is a very small piece of the puzzle of the much larger problem of violence against women and the impact it has on their health. Many public-health professionals oppose these types of one-sided anti-coercion policies that single out abortion. Focusing solely on coercive abortion, like HBs 4787 and 4830, takes away from the very broad problem of domestic and sexual violence, which is the root of coercion.

Reproductive coercion is male behavior of domestic abuse that controls contraception and pregnancy choices of female partners. This includes many forms of abuse including forcing a partner to become pregnant, to carry a pregnancy, to discontinue a pregnancy, or sabotaging a partner's form of contraception, like poking holes in condoms or flushing birth control pills. If the Michigan Legislature genuinely wants to meaningfully help victims of abuse they should focus on policies that address the broader issues of domestic violence and reproductive coercion.

If it is the goal of the Michigan Legislature is to reduce the number of abortions in Michigan, preventing unintended pregnancies should be their top priority. We should be working together to move forward commonsense policies that would improve access for low-income women to reproductive and prenatal health care, expand insurance coverage of contraceptives, and provide comprehensive sex education to our young people.